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SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR WHA/EX, WHA/CAR, S/CRS, H, AND INR/IAA  
DEPT PLEASE ALSO PASS TO USAID FOR LAC/CAR  
WHA/EX PLEASE PASS TO USOAS  
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SUBJECT: CODEL MEEK SURVEYS HURRICANE DAMAGE, ASSESSES NEED  
FOR HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

¶1. (U) This message is sensitive but unclassified. Please handle accordingly.

¶2. (SBU) Summary: A Congressional delegation headed by Rep. Kendrick Meek visited Haiti September 12-13 to survey the damage caused by recent hurricanes and assess the country's need for humanitarian assistance. In meetings with the Prime Minister and President, the delegation offered their condolences for the victims of the flooding and expressed their interest in a precise, comprehensive needs assessment that they could share with other interested legislators and local officials. The Prime Minister and President underscored GOH priorities as restoring broken transport links to affected areas, getting needed supplies to victims, and carrying out an overall damage assessment. End summary.

¶3. (U) Representatives Kendrick Meek (D-FL), Yvette Clarke (D-NY), and Donna Edwards (D-MD), accompanied by Congressional Black Caucus Executive Director Dr. Joe Leonard and House Armed Services Committee Professional Staff Member Mark Lewis, met with Prime Minister Michele Pierre-Louis September 12 and President Rene Preval September 13. Their visit to Haiti included a overview of disaster relief efforts by USAID/OFDA representatives, an operational briefing aboard the USS Kearsarge, and an overflight of areas affected by the recent flooding.

PM DESCRIBES DISASTER RECOVERY EFFORTS  
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¶4. (SBU) PM Pierre-Louis gave the delegation an overview of the GOH's disaster recovery efforts. Six critical bridges were destroyed by the recent storms, she said, making delivery of food, water, and other essential supplies by land virtually impossible. She added that the GOH's limited access to the countryside hampered efforts to provide a comprehensive assessment of Haiti's humanitarian needs. Pierre-Louis also described the GOH's work coordinating assistance by NGOs, foreign governments, and international organizations and said the customs administration was implementing a fast-track process to speed the release of humanitarian supplies through customs.

DELEGATION STRESSES IMPORTANCE OF DAMAGE ASSESSMENT  
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¶5. (SBU) Congressman Meek emphasized that many Members of Congress wanted to assist Haiti and were ready to press for

supplemental disaster relief funding, mobilize local U.S. government officials, and to work with the Haitian diaspora to augment assistance efforts already underway. Rep. Meek said he was working to assemble a bipartisan group of "Friends of Haiti" in the U.S. Congress to meet with PM Pierre-Louis and President Preval during their next visit to Washington. He added that he hoped Haitians would not take to the seas in increasing numbers due to the worsening conditions in the country, and renewed his support for the provision of Temporary Protected Status to certain Haitian nationals illegally present in the United States.

¶16. (SBU) Rep. Clarke added that recent disasters may turn into an opportunity if international donors, in cooperation with the GOH, mobilize to rebuild Haiti's damaged infrastructure and address lingering problems of food security. Rep. Edwards, drawing on her extensive experience in the philanthropic sector, urged the Prime Minister to develop a comprehensive needs assessment as soon as possible to facilitate the work of international donors.

#### PRESIDENT EMPHASIZES SEVERITY OF DAMAGE

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¶17. (SBU) In his meeting with the delegation September 13, President Preval likened Haiti to "a country at war with God," noting the extent of the damage and the fact that critical infrastructure and communications links suffered systemic destruction in these storms. The GOH's highest priorities are to re-establish links to the provinces, provide needed supplies, and assess the damage. He added

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that he understood the need to communicate extensively with the international community, and appreciated the support of the visiting delegation.

#### REP. MEEK OUTLINES EFFORTS TO AUGMENT U.S. ASSISTANCE

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¶18. (SBU) Rep. Meek extended his condolences to Preval for the casualties caused by the recent hurricanes, and added that he scheduled his emergency trip to Haiti to reaffirm his friendship with the Haitian people. A number of Members of Congress, governors, and local officials had expressed a desire to help. Although the upcoming recess and election season make for a challenging Congressional environment, Meek said he would use hearings and other outreach efforts to publicize the dramatic situation in Haiti and attempt to secure additional Congressional funding for the relief efforts.

¶19. (SBU) Rep. Clarke noted that Haiti had "many friends waiting to help," but that coordinating international assistance would require extensive effort by the President and Prime Minister to engage donors and coordinate their work. Rep. Edwards said that her constituents were alarmed by the extent of the flooding in Haiti and added that private organizations could work together with international donors to ensure that Haiti's recovery needs are met.

¶10. (U) This cable has been cleared by Congressman Meek's office.  
SANDERSON